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ABSTRACT

As a follow-up of an earlier study indicating that reading aloud to reading methods students influenced them to use children's literature in their teaching, a study investigated (1) the effects of reading aloud in a methods class to students who also read to children regularly during the same semester, and (2) whether the potentially greater effects of both reading to children and being read to by the instructor would be discernible in data gathered by the same Likert-scale questionnaire. All students in the reading methods courses were read to in class each day, and many of those students read to children twice weekly in a volunteer program. At the end of the semester, 24 of the students who had been reading regularly to children were asked to respond to the questionnaire. Results showed that these students agreed more strongly with the questionnaire items than did groups studied previously, bought copies of books read in class, used children's literature in field-experience classrooms and course assignments, and offered a number of positive spontaneous comments about the value of reading aloud to children. (EL)

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Effects of Reading-Aloud Experiences in the Professional Training of Preservice Elementary Teachers

The practice of reading aloud to elementary school children has a long history of being recommended (Huey, 1908). Cramer (1975) gives an excellent rationale for this practice, which has recently been embellished by the work of Applebee (1978, 1980) and Stein (1978) who contend that children use their scemata for stories that have been developed in part from being read to in order to comprehend new stories. Because of the many benefits attributed to reading aloud to children, reading teacher educators are concerned with identifying and developing effective ways to present the practice and its effects to undergraduate preservice

teachers.

The present study investigated the effects of reading aloud to undergraduate reading methods students who were also reading to children on a regular basis during the semester in which they were enrolled in the methods course. As such, it represents a follow-up of an earlier study (Andrews, Moss, & Stansell, 1985), which indicated that simply reading aloud to methods students influenced their notions of the worth of this activity and their expressed inclinations to use children's literature in their teaching.

Background

The earlier study was undertaken as a result of our decision to begin each of our reading methods class sessions by reading aloud from a children's literature selection. The goals involved in this decision were modest: to familiarize our students with children's literature, allow them to enjoy this literature, and encourage them by example to read to their own classes and otherwise incorporate literature in reading instruction. We soon began to see some evidence that these goals were being met as some students showed us their new copies of books we had read in class, while others shared units and classroom activities involving literature that they had developed, and still others told of reading to young relatives or neighbors on occasion. Informal comments as well as course evaluations clearly indicated that students did enjoy being read to in class. We had initially been concerned about allocating approximately one-sixth of each class period to reading aloud, and although we were encouraged by these results, we also sought a way to assess whether any other positive effects resulted from this practice.

During the first semester of reading aloud to our students, and in several subsequent semesters, we noted a number of positive comments about reading aloud in the informal feedback received from them. We then developed a questionnaire that included those comments which occurred most frequently across several semesters. The questionnaire was then administered at the end of a semester to 24 randomly selected students of ours who were read to in every class session, and 24 randomly selected students from other sections of the reading methods course who were not read to by their instructor. All 48 students, in responding to the questionnaire, were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Agree; 5=Strongly Disagree) with each of the following twelve statements: reading aloud to elementary school students will 1) help students discover that books have meaningful intent, 2) help students learn important lessons about life, 3) enhance and maintain the teacher's interest in teaching reading, 4) help students become familiar with language patterns, 5) facilitate value clarification by students, 6) maintain the interest of students in the reading instruction they receive, 7) enhance communication between students and teachers, 8) enhance and maintain the interest of students in books, 10) provide for students a relaxing moment in their day, 11) facilitate vocabulary growth, and 12) develop camaraderie among students.

The previous study cited above indicated that students who were read to appeared to become more inclined to purchase and use children's literature, as noted previously. Also, a comparison of the mean responses to questionnaire items suggested that students who were read to agreed

more strongly with the statements than did their counterparts who were not read to (see Table 1).

Problem

While comparison of the mean responses from the two groups for each questionnaire item showed stronger agreement with these items among those students who were read to, only two means (for items 3 and 12) were significantly different when analyzed through use of a t-test. Some care should be taken, however, in interpreting this result. Mean responses from the group which was not read to ranged from 1.3 for item 10 to 2.5 for item 12, indicating a fairly high level of agreement with the questionnaire statements among this group. The actual impact of being read to might therefore be obscured by a ceiling effect created in part by the five-point response scale which would not allow more precision in expressions of agreement. In view of this possibility, and in the light of our observation data from students who were read to, we would conclude that reading aloud in the methods course is probably a worthwhile activity in terms of its impact upon students, but one that might have stronger effects in combination with some related reading activity than it apparently did alone. Since we had hypothesized, early in the course of the previous study, that a combination of being read to in class and actually reading to children on a regular basis during the same semester might produce greater effects than being read to alone, the present study was undertaken to investigate this hypothesis. An additional purpose of this study was to determine whether the potentially greater effects of both reading to children and being read to by the methods course instructor would be discernible in data gathered through use of the same Likert-

scale questionnaire.

Method

In a semester subsequent to those in which data for the earlier study were collected, all of the students in those reading methods course sections taught by the researchers were read to in class each day as before. In addition, an opportunity was made available for students to participate in a local volunteer program that involved reading aloud twice weekly to preschool children attending day care centers. A number of the students elected to participate in this program, while others chose to read twice weekly to children with whom they were acquainted. The researchers did encourage students to participate in one of these reading-aloud activities, but also explained that their participation would not affect their final grades.

During the course of the semester, the researchers observed their students to determine whether the same kinds of behaviors noted in the previous study (buying books read in class, using children's literature in units, etc.) were occurring. At the end of the semester, 24 of the students who had been reading regularly to children were randomly selected and asked to respond to the questionnaire. Observation records were compared to those from the previous study, and t-tests were used to compare differences in mean responses to questionnaire items from this group (identified as "Read & Read To" in Tables 1 and 2, below) and the two groups from the previous study (identified as "Read To Only" and "No Reading" in Tables 1 and 2).

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the observation records showed that these students also

bought copies of the books read in class, used children's literature in field-experience classrooms and course assignments, and offered a number of positive spontaneous comments about the value of reading aloud to children. In addition, some commented on their enjoyment of the experience of reading to children; others described children's reactions to specific stories; and still others described children's reactions to various activities they had developed to accompany the reading.

The questionnaire data from this study shows that students who read and were read to agreed more strongly with the questionnaire items than did either group in the previous study. Means and standard deviations for item responses for all three groups are given in Table 1. The t-test comparisons of these means, summarized in Table 2, indicated that

Insert Table 1 here

Insert Table 2 here

the combination of being read to in class and reading regularly to children within the same semester was more effective than being read to alone in producing stronger agreement with the statements on the questionnaire. In spite of the ceiling effect described previously, mean differences were significant for all but four items. Three of these four items produced a high level of mean agreement in the No Reading group, and the mean difference between the Read & Read To group and the No Reading group on the fourth item (item 5) was significant at the .10 level. For the three items (1, 6, and 10) which produced relatively high mean agreement in the No Reading group, we would suggest in retrospect that such

a level of agreement is to be expected among any group that had ever been read to on a regular basis at any point in life. Such experiences are obviously meaningful as well as interesting and relaxing, whether they occur in school in the context of reading instruction or at home. The "truth" of other statements on the questionnaire would not, we feel, be so obvious to students in the No Reading group; without being read to, for example, they would not agree so strongly with the statement that reading aloud develops camaraderie because they would not experience its development in their own class as a result of daily reading.

We would also suggest, given the data from our present study, that while the questionnaire was probably not sensitive enough to allow clear interpretation of the results from the previous study, it is sufficiently sensitive to detect the effects of the combined reading-aloud experience described here. This contention is of course subject to the results of replications, which we would encourage. Further research might also try to examine the impact of different combinations of reading-aloud experiences, as well as the impact of such experiences extended over more than one semester. While such additional study is clearly in order, we would recommend that reading teacher educators who want to see their students reading to elementary school children begin to read regularly to those students and to find ways for those students to read aloud to children.

Table 1

Questionnaire item means and standard deviations for three groups of undergraduate students

Questionnaire statement	Read and Read To (N=24) mean	SD	Read To Only (N=24) mean	SD	No Reading (N=24) mean	SD
Meaningful intent	1.2	.3	1.3	.5	1.4	.7
Life Lessons	1.5	.3	1.8	.9	2.0	1.0
Teacher's interest	1.5	.7	1.6	.7	2.3	1.1
Language patterns	1.2	.3	1.3	.5	1.5	.6
Value clarification	1.6	.9	1.7	.8	2.0	.9
Student interest	1.3	.4	1.5	.8	1.5	.7
St./Tchr. communication	1.1	.3	1.6	.8	1.8	.7
Student writing	1.6	.7	2.0	1.2	2.1	1.1
Student interest	1.2	.3	1.3	.4	1.5	.7
Student relaxation	1.2	.3	1.2	.7	1.3	.7
Vocabulary growth	1.2	.3	1.3	.5	1.4	.6
Student camaraderie	1.6	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.5	1.0

Table 2

Significance Levels for t-Test Comparisons of Questionnaire Item Response Means

Items	Means Compared: Read To Only/ No Reading	Read & Read To/ Read To Only	Read & Read To/ No Reading
Meaningful intent	n/s	n/s	n/s
Life lessons	n/s	n/s	.05
Teacher's interest	.01	n/s	.01
Language patterns	n/s	n/s	.05
Value clarification	n/s	n/s	n/s
Student interest	n/s	n/s	n/s
St./Tchr. communication	n/s	.01	.01
Student writing	n/s	n/s	.05
Student interest	n/s	n/s	.05
Student relaxation	n/s	n/s	n/s
Vocabulary growth	n/s	n/s	.01
Student camaraderie	.05	n/s	.01

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